What Can I Do to Prepare for a Pandemic?

You can do several things now to help your family be more ready for a flu pandemic:

- ► Store an ample supply of water and nonperishable food.
- ► Keep routinely used prescription drugs and nonprescription drugs such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen and anti-diarrhea medication on hand.
- ► Talk to loved ones about how they would like to be cared for should they get sick.
- ► Maintain supplies such as soap or sanitizers, thermometers, surgical masks and gloves, tissues, toilet paper, garbage bags, diapers, and batteries.
- ► Make alternate plans for work and childcare should you be ill, or if schools/childcare facilities close.

Why Should I Prepare If We Don't **Know When This Will Happen?**

What you do to prepare for pandemic flu will not be a wasted effort. The steps we're recommending are also useful for other kinds of emergencies such as blizzards or long-term power outages. Pandemics can be quite serious; more than 500,000 Americans died during the 1918 pandemic. When a natural disaster such as a hurricane happens, people from other areas can usually step in to provide relief. A pandemic is different. Everyone around the country and world is likely to be dealing with the same problems at roughly the same time. While we don't know when a new flu pandemic may begin, it makes sense to prepare early. There is no doubt the impact on our communities and their ability to

recover will be more severe if we don't prepare for our own families' needs.

How Can I Help My Community Prepare?

You can help your community prepare by contacting local public health officials, hospitals, essential businesses and schools to see what they are doing to prepare and how you can help.

What Special Measures Might Public Health Officials Recommend?

Working together with federal and local officials, the Wyoming Department of Health will track the progress and nature of the disease during a pandemic. We will provide important, current information and recommendations to Wyoming medical professionals and residents through a number of communication methods. Officials may also recommend or require certain public health measures to help slow or limit the spread of infection. Such actions might include:

- Targeting available vaccine and antiviral medications to certain groups of people at high risk of complications and those in essential occupations such as healthcare workers.
- ▶ Isolating sick people in hospitals, home or other facilities.
- ▶ Identifying and quarantining exposed people.
- ► Closing schools, childcare facilities, and workplaces as needed.
- ► Canceling public events such as sporting events or community celebrations.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Wyoming Department of Health: wyomingpandemicflu.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: pandemicflu.gov

Wyoming Department of Health Public Health and Terrorism Preparedness Program 401 Hathaway Building Cheyenne, WY 82002

The

Pandemic Influenza

Seasonal Influenza

Avian/Bird Influenza

What You Should Know What You Can Do



Commit to your health.

August 2007

The Wyoming Department of Health wants you to know more about pandemic influenza (flu). Pandemic influenza outbreaks can be both disruptive and deadly.

We're going to explain what pandemic flu is and what it is not. We're going to offer some common-sense advice that should help you cope should an outbreak occur.

We'll also let you know what you might expect from public health officials during a pandemic.

The viruses that can cause pandemic flu outbreaks are unpredictable. Experts can't tell us when the next pandemic may happen, but they do suggest that history tells us another pandemic influenza outbreak is likely at some point.

While pandemic flu is serious, there is no reason to panic. Planning and preparation can help you, your family and your community should an outbreak occur.

What is Influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. Symptoms of the flu include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. While people frequently say "stomach flu" to describe vomiting, nausea, or diarrhea, these illnesses are almost always caused by viruses other than influenza, bacteria, or parasites. Influenza can cause severe illness and complications. About 36,000 Americans die each year from flu complications. Seasonal flu happens every year, usually in the winter months, and is generally predictable.

What is Pandemic Flu?

Pandemic influenza (flu) is a global outbreak of influenza disease from a new virus strain that is not like past versions. Most or all people will not have any natural immunity to a new pandemic virus, and there will likely not be an existing vaccine. That's why such a virus can spread easily from person to person and sweep rapidly around the world.

What is the Difference between Seasonal and Pandemic Flu?

There are many influenza virus strains and they change constantly. Seasonal flu outbreaks are somewhat predictable because they are caused by strains similar to those that have circulated before. Young and healthy people generally have some immunity against closely related strains of virus from one year to the next. Flu pandemics are much less predictable. Because they are caused by a new virus strain that most people have never been exposed to, everyone will be susceptible. The numbers of sick people will likely be much higher than normal. Pandemic strains can also cause more severe symptoms and more serious complications. There have been three flu pandemics in the last 100 years.

What is Avian/Bird Influenza?

Avian (bird) flu is caused by a group of viruses that occur naturally in birds. Wild birds all over the world carry these relatively harmless viruses but don't usually get sick from them. Some strains of avian influenza can be very contagious among birds and can kill domesticated birds such as chickens and turkeys. These viruses are described as "highly pathogenic," which means they are very deadly to birds. Bird flu viruses rarely infect people.

You may have heard about a bird flu strain that is spreading quickly among wild waterfowl and poultry in many countries, but not yet in America. This strain of H5N1 is a highly pathogenic virus in birds, but does not spread easily from person to person. Some people have become sick, but most had very close contact with infected birds or their feces or respiratory secretions, or uncooked meat from infected birds. At this time the bird flu virus does not spread easily from an infected person to someone else.

Scientists are concerned that this particular H5N1 bird flu could change into a new virus that spreads easily among people, causing a pandemic. That's why health experts are closely tracking the virus.

Will There Be a Vaccine During a Pandemic?

Because the virus causing a flu pandemic will be a new strain, it is highly unlikely that a vaccine will be available early. It takes several months to develop an effective vaccine, and it will not be possible to produce enough for everyone quickly. To get the most benefit from a limited vaccine supply, the vaccine will probably be distributed first to certain groups of people such as those at high-risk for complications or healthcare workers.

Will Medications Be Available?

There are certain medications that can sometimes be used to reduce the impact of flu. "Tamiflu" is one of the most common. However, we don't know how effective these drugs may be in fighting pandemic flu. The state and federal government are stockpiling some of these antiviral drugs, but distribution of these limited supplies will likely be targeted to certain groups.

How Might Pandemic Flu Affect My Life?

While we can't say ahead of time how severe a pandemic may be, it is likely that many people in your community, in our state, all over the country and around the world will become ill. There could be potentially overwhelming increases in the numbers of people seeking help from our healthcare system. Travel and public gatherings may be limited and schools may close. Because many people may be ill, may decide to stay home or may need to care for others, businesses and other organizations may have considerably fewer workers than normal. This could affect both the commercial and public services we usually expect in our communities.

How Can I Look After Myself and Others During a Pandemic?

For the most part, the same common-sense steps that are most effective during the seasonal flu season will be the best protection strategies during a pandemic:

- ► Frequently wash your hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer.
- ► Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.
- ► Avoid being around those who are ill as much as possible.
- ► Stay home from work or school when you are sick.
- ► Regularly disinfect common contact surfaces such as phones, counters and doorknobs.
- ► Avoid large gatherings of people if you can.
- ► Follow the guidance offered by public health officials.